

VISUAL  
PAUL  
IAN

# Bigged Disney

It was a Paul McCarthy fest in New York throughout July with three exhibitions including the massive work at Park Avenue Armory, WS, a psychosexual retelling of Snow White. No artist distills the excesses of American mass culture as McCarthy does. His infantile and excremental performances, full of repressed sexuality and latent violence, expose what really lies beneath the veneer of all those saccharine wholesome 'family values.'

McCarthy has pushed against constructed notions of normality for the last 40 years. However nothing prepared me for the extremes of WS, which was elemental and primitive in its urgency, its sheer scale and excessiveness in direct proportion to the penetration of the Disney empire into the American psyche.

The Park Avenue Armory, set among exclusive apartments on the upper East Side, is a bizarre setting for the staging of a McCarthy exhibition: a clean and proper exterior for an out of control and messy interior. Entering the massive doors of the Armory, I am aware of the first of many of the skewed worlds that McCarthy offers. WS, or White Snow, is an inverted remix of Snow White, taking the form of a depraved, drunken house party, with McCarthy appearing in many of the video works as a Walt Disney figure or Walt Paul. The Snow White and the Seven Dwarves story, first remixed by Disney in 1937 from The Brothers Grimm original, is in McCarthy's version, like The Grimms', visceral and violent.

WS is an insanely ambitious work, including over seven hours of videos, all of which require multiple visits to get through, and a massive enchanted forest with over 50,000 artificial plants and towering trees that are entirely excremental in appearance. Set amid this forest is a recreation of McCarthy's original, ranch style family home.

Taking over 85 trucks to transport it from McCarthy's studio in Los Angeles, WS is on the scale of a Hollywood production, appearing like a soundstage, complete with visible camera crews, scaffolding and lighting rigs. McCarthy's creation is another of his perverse versions of Hollywoodland. Recently the artist purchased over a 1000

**VISUAL ARTS**  
**MICHAELA GLEAVE, A DAY IS LONGER THAN A YEAR**  
**DARREN JORGENSEN**

# Dark arena

Two theatre spotlights hang just above head height, throwing large red and blue circles onto the walls. The lights revolve incessantly, elongating into ovals as they move away from their sources, making unnatural eclipses as they pass through each other.

Michaela Gleave is an installation artist who has worked with artificial snow, balloons, fog, glitter and water. Her work forms part of the phenomenological turn in installation art that has for the last decade wanted to simulate nature inside the gallery. With only two lights, this installation is a more austere version of these immersive environments, its sharp poetics resembling the clean edges of 1960s minimalism. Yet nature is at play here too, as Gleave created this work out of a residency with the CSIRO's Astronomy and Space Science Division.

Space research and minimalism have much in common. They share a fascination with the most elemental of forces and shapes. They share a coldness too, as these elements are indifferent to human fate. In Australia, space scientists work with the most distant of subjects, as they process data from the radio telescopes that dot the country. One of the most recent developments in deep space science is the detection of planets that are orbiting other stars.

The technique involves measuring a shift in the spectrum of starlight. A planet will wobble this spectrum and cause a star to become more red or blue. These are the colours that Gleave uses in her installation, their momentum shifting the shape of the spotlights moving on the walls.

It is as if we are at the centre of some deep space simulation, as Gleave conjures associations with the movement of planets and suns with the simplest of means. Yet the austere beauty of the work is also cursed by the kind of anthropocentrism that haunts space science. The attempt to find extra-solar planets, like the search

acres of desert scrubland to recreate his own fucked-up western town—McCarthy's Dodge City. I can't think of any other artist who works on such an enormous theme park scale. His target is mass culture so the idea of more is more and bigger is better has a crazy logic to it. As Walt Paul exclaims in a fit of repeated frustration while in bed with White Snow, "Why does it have to be so big?" "Why does it have to be so big?"

One of the first elements one encounters in WS is sound, an overwhelming orgy of infantile grunting, occasional fits of laughter and screaming fill out the massive Drill Hall of the Park Armory, accompanying videos of Walt Paul, with chocolate sauce soiled underpants around his ankles, frantically screaming at his family of inbred cowering dwarfs. Walt Paul appears at different times as father, lover, dictator and slave to White Snow. This is Disneyland on crack.

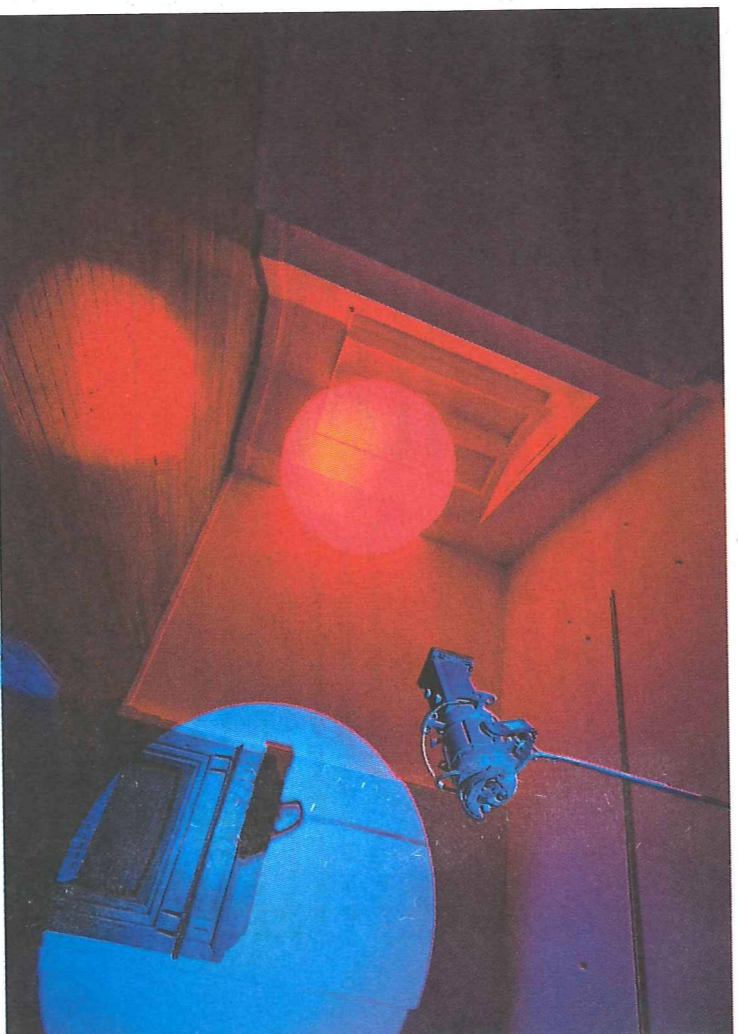
WS provides further weird viewpoints and inside-out spaces: massive billboard-sized video screens; secluded spaces with even darker video content; balcony views allowing one to survey McCarthy's sprawling Disneyland from above; and views directly behind the massive video screens. These multiple

vantage points are echoed in The Dwarf's house. We peer in through the windows, viewing a crime scene: Walt's demise, a broom handle shoved in his mouth and exiting his anus.

Such multiple viewpoints ensure the audience is made well aware of the artifice, the fakery of McCarthy's sound stage. Ultimately he is making the point that mass culture is projected onto us, its reality a slippery construction. On leaving WS one could enter a deranged Disney gift shop, with all manner of Disney merchandise sprawled out over the room, crudely signed and editioned by Walt Paul.

McCarthy is the sublime king of perversion and WS a lasting testament that art doesn't need to make you feel good about the world to be interesting. John Waters wanted to make films that made you feel dirty, McCarthy's art makes you feel not just dirty but in need of a good hose down.

Image: Paul McCarthy, WS, 2013, photo Joshua White, courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth



for water on Mars, is deeply invested with the hope of finding another Earth in deep space. So too Gleave's cosmic theatre returns us to ourselves, as we are trapped in the middle of the room, for fear of moving and throwing a shadow onto the orbit of lights. The installation turns into a kind of dark cinema that makes the space claustrophobic.

So it is that the cosmos, proving to be so indifferent to us, makes a troubling subject for art. It awes and repulses at the same time, fascinates and horrifies in its mathematical and glorious perfection.

This visitor wanted both something more and something less from this installation, for a sound to accompany the light, or a revolving chair to simulate an astronaut's experience of the stars. Yet such comforts would move us beyond the subject of Gleave's installation, which is the inherent austerity of space and time, and the beauty of light.

Michaela Gleave, A Day Is Longer Than A Year, Fremantle Arts Centre, Perth, 8 June–21 July  
Image: Michaela Gleave, A Day Is Longer Than a Year, photo Jessica Wyard